



## **HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE**

### **Statement of Subcommittee Chairwoman Martha McSally (R-AZ) Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee**

*“Border Security, Commerce and Travel: Commissioner McAleenan’s Vision for the Future of CBP”*

April 25, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to start by welcoming the newly confirmed U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan (Mac Ah Leenan) to testify before our Committee today, and congratulate him on his Senate confirmation last month.

The Commissioner and CBP have been, and will continue to be, the focal point for many of the Trump Administration’s border security priorities. The nation is fortunate that the Commissioner is a seasoned veteran – a consummate professional who knows the agency and its issues well, having been with CBP since the early days of its creation.

CBP is a massive law enforcement agency, created from the fusion of several legacy agencies and established in 2003. In fact, today it is the largest law enforcement organization in the Federal Government, but up until 2015 it was not even authorized in statute – a situation that was finally addressed by the work of this subcommittee.

The 19 codified duties of the Commissioner are some of the most important responsibilities that Congress has given to any single official – securing the border, facilitating legitimate travel and commerce, and administering important national security programs that prevent bad actors from gaining access to the country.

And with any organization this large, there are significant challenges.

Staffing shortages at both the ports of entry and in the Border Patrol, exacerbated by both a hiring process that takes far too long and retention challenges that have persisted for years, with no signs of abatement.

CBP is critically understaffed and remains well below its congressionally mandated staffing levels by more than 1,000 CBP Officers and 1,900 Border Patrol Agents.

Combined with the growing crisis along the Southwest border, this shortage has the potential to put our Nation’s security at risk.

The number of illegal border crossings during the month of March shows an urgent need to address the ongoing situation at the border.

We witnessed a 203 percent increase from March 2017 compared to March 2018 and a 37 percent increase from last month to this month – the largest increase from month to month since 2011.

Before 2013, approximately 1 out of every 100 arriving aliens claimed credible fear, or asylum. Today, more than 1 out of 10 do so.

Saying the words “credible fear,” just as many aliens are coached by the drug cartels to do, often permits aliens to be released into the country, regardless of the merit of such claims to await a court date years into the future, that many do not even show up to.

We also continue to see our system plagued by increased levels of fraud among individuals crossing the border which then makes it more difficult to help those who need it the most.

In the past, over 90% of arriving aliens were single adult males. Today 40% are families and children.

The traffickers and smugglers know that if you arrive with a family, you have a better chance of being released into the United States with most families only able to be detained for less than 20 days due to court rulings.

We have seen smuggling organizations advertise this as an enticement and we have seen traffickers use children as leverage to gain entry into our country.

Just since January, almost 22,000 unaccompanied minors and 40,000 families arrived at the border under these policies that enrich the cartels.

In other words, because of the insanity of loop holes in current law, the next generation of DACA-like people are crossing the border and disappearing into our communities.

We are a nation of immigrants and we welcome about a million legal immigrants into our country each year, but we are being taken advantage of and it needs to stop.

In addition to a border wall, we also need a policy wall as well, which is why I have been calling for these border security loop holes to be closed.

We must change our immigration policy to enable the agencies charged with protecting our border to do their job and quickly remove dangerous public safety risks from our communities.

Thankfully, in response to these troubling border security trends, the President has called for the deployment of thousands of National Guard troops to support the effort of the men and women of CBP.

National Guard personnel have supported border security operations several times in recent years. They have built fence and roads, conducted ground surveillance along the border, flown aviation support missions, monitored camera feeds, and provided intelligence support.

They are truly a force-multiplier that can provide unique skills to boost to our border security. I would like to thank Arizona Governor Ducey and the other Governors along the border who have answered the call to partner with the Federal government to deploy these border security reinforcements and support the CBP mission. The additional men and woman deployed on our border will reduce threats posed by violent drug cartels and other bad actors that threaten border communities and the Nation as a whole.

In addition to the deployment of the Guard, Congress has also recently provided CBP with billions of dollars to invest in technology, wall replacement and new wall construction that will serve as a powerful deterrent to illicit entry.

We will look forward to hearing an update on the status of wall construction and a concrete, no pun intended, timeline for its completion.

I called this hearing today to allow the Commissioner an opportunity to present our subcommittee, which has principal oversight responsibility over the agency, with his vision for CBP which has an outsized role in our national security. I look forward to his testimony, followed by a thoughtful discussion.

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